

Free-Riding on the Juggernaut of Conscience

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Riders of the Juggernaut are exalted by right of their berths aboard it—they claim, and receive, whether graciously or haughtily, the adulation of the masses among whom the Juggernaut passes. The more-fervent among the throng find victims among their number to throw in its path by way of sacrifice that it might find pleasing. These, along with delirious others persuaded that their own death beneath it is the surest passage to Heaven, are crushed to oblivion by the Juggernaut's massive wheels, presenting not the slightest impediment, neither to the Juggernaut nor to any of its godlike passengers.

The memory of the Nazi-instigated ethnic cleansings known as the Holocaust became the Juggernaut of Conscience chiefly because Germany lost World War II to countries whose governments were strongly influenced by groups that identified with its victims. And, of course, it did not lose in the sense of negotiating a peace and continuing on under its own government—it catastrophically lost control of all its own territory and, knowing that such would be its lot in surrendering, fought a long and desperate struggle to a point that was literally death for millions of its citizens and metaphorically for its infrastructure and economy. Ineluctably, those inside the concentration camps partook of the suffering and devastation under-gone by those outside them.

Adding to this self-reinforcing cycle of horror and destruction was the fact that, like the war itself, the German racial enterprise was the most highly mechanized program of involuntary population movement ever undertaken. The long, doom-bound train of locked boxcars or cattle cars filled with hopeless deportees remains perhaps the central image of the Holocaust despite the extensive use of just such conveyances in exactly the same ways not only for the Gulag of Soviet Russia, but for the ethnic counter-cleansings mounted on a virtually equal scale against Germans immediately after the war.

The Holocaust occurred in one of the most densely populated, developed regions in the world, and so rapidly attained the rank of history's largest project of its kind as well, not only in terms of numbers deported and the apparent death toll among them, but even in terms of the distances traveled by its victims in the course of their incarceration. Combined with the ravages of disease, exposure, starvation, overwork and the deliberate killing of huge numbers under the impetus of various motivations, the carnage attained a scale comparable to the decimation sustained by untargeted civilian populations from the war through many of the same proximate causes, as well as others, such as aerial bombardment.

And, again like many German survivors who found their ancestral homes and hence themselves, their families, and all their possessions outside the foreshortened limits of postwar rump Germany, survivors of the Holocaust, many virtually bereft of family and even health, found that recovering their pre-war lands or dwellings would entail a lethal struggle against entrenched opponents already long in possession of their sundered homesteads.

The legacy of this unparalleled saga of cruelty, misfortune, and destruction has been a tidal wave of recrimination that even the hard-working, conscience-smitten millions of surviving Germans have been unable to absorb by themselves, even through decades of blame-taking, perpetrator-hunting, reparation-paying, child-indoctrinating and even prosecution of those few among their number with the temerity to suggest that these processes may finally have been carried far enough.

No, blame for the Holocaust has seeped out not only to nearby neutrals such as Switzerland for not providing as much refuge as hindsight suggests might have been wanted, but beyond to conquered countries such as Poland and France, and on to even those countries that spilled vast amounts of their blood and treasure to stop and kill the Nazi monster such as the United States and Great Britain.

And so well-served by its beneficiaries is the specter of the Holocaust that it grows with the passage of time, attracting ever more adulation from the masses stricken with the guilt of having been spared it themselves and being the offspring of parents similarly so spared. It is this process that has led to the vast proportions of the Juggernaut of Conscience as it rumbles over the fields of today's humanity, increasing in weight and speed as it cuts an ever-wider swath among the unworthy fortunate.

But despite the Juggernaut's rude health and limitless capacity for expansion, a cancer is metastasizing aboard it that will one day break its axles, shatter its crossbeams, and bring it to a sudden, catastrophic halt in the center of a mob that has suddenly realized that they have been its dupes for many years and have heaped onto it far too great a portion of what would today remain their own treasure but for the inertial deception practiced upon them by the Juggernaut and its now-dismounted riders.

That cancer is "free riders." Free riders are the frauds and counterfeits—those basking in the sympathy and deference, not to mention in many cases the money, of the masses—who never sustained so much as a scratch or a bump from the Holocaust. These include not only those who falsely claim to have been its victims directly or in prospect by being subject to capture and deportation, but those who falsely claim to be the children of victims and those who falsely claim to have lost typically large numbers of family members to it.

Not all free riders are equally cancerous. Most malignant of all are those, typically misrepresenters of their own selves, who knowingly spread, or encourage the belief of, false tales of their past desolations. They are often able to avoid exposure to inconvenient questionings of their stories' particulars by feigning intense sensitivity to the pain of memory, and only once or twice privately "confiding"; a story that its hearer then thoughtfully spreads about among friends and acquaintances with the caveat that it cannot ever be discussed with the sufferer himself, as it is "too painful."

The proportion of free riders to genuine victims gazing down at the worshipful mob from the Juggernaut has been rising ever since the Juggernaut was set in motion during the postwar war-crimes trials. Genuine victims undoubtedly attained a minority status among the passenger list by 1950, no matter how trivial a misfortune be allowed as entitling one to the true status of victim. Sixty years later, the proportion of deserving within the jostling throng that overloads the Juggernaut is minuscule, even as the skill and dedication of the actors who make up the majority grows.

Slightly less malignant, but cancerous nonetheless, are those who gained their places aboard the Juggernaut through giving themselves "the benefit of the doubt." This group is made up primarily of those claiming to have lost family members "in the Holocaust"; when in fact they have no explicit

information of even deportation, much less death, of relatives they knew about in places and at times when they could have been affected by the Holocaust. These are, in the milder cases, people with whom they have lost touch, and might have lost touch even without the upheavals and disruptions that affected virtually all of Europe during and after World War II. They are people who themselves may lead lives of a style that could be described as disrupted who themselves would be hard for their relatives to maintain contact with if they did try. Haven't heard anything in a long time? They died in the Holocaust. Finally heard from someone? Probably an imposter, looking for money or a way to get to the States. What *language* is that, anyway? Can *you* read it? They died in the Holocaust.

Finally, there are the conveniently gullible, people of little curiosity and even less doubt. These frequently start out as the dupes of either of the two more-malignant classes of free riders, but then smoothly segue over to the predatory side of the equation. They are told that Great-Aunt Sylvie or Grandpa Morris was caught in one of the infamous Aktions and was gassed at <any of the 1500 concentration camps that existed.> Probably Great-Grandmother Emma, too, assuming she hadn't already died by the time she would have been forced onto the train. Just as often, there are numbers in the place of names, such as "31 members of my family," or "all but the three who made it here," or anonymous groups such as that. Anyone inconsiderate enough to ask a name or relationship is certain to receive a pained stare instead of an answer.

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And when the breakdown finally occurs, and the free riders are spilled out onto the road among their erstwhile worshippers, those feeling vengeful urges against any of them will have the comfort of the enormous odds that any given one of them never paid in any way for their high and mighty ride aboard the Juggernaut of Conscience.

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